



Seeking therapy, understandably, can be uncomfortable for anyone. When you are Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, or Transgender, your discomfort can be magnified. Stories of adolescents being sent to therapists to be “fixed” or experiences of intolerant helping professionals are easy to recall and they may have even happened to you. Such experiences can prevent our community from getting the very help that we need. Here are some things you may want to consider when seeking a therapist:

✚ **Remember you are the consumer.**

- When finding a therapist, make sure YOU choose. Therapy is an intensely personal and complex relationship. Consequently, not every therapist is a good match for every client. It is okay to ask questions up front on the phone to get a sense if you and your therapist “fit”. It is also okay to take a few sessions to make that decision if you are unclear. If you don’t feel comfortable, heed that information, and keep looking until you find someone with whom you feel safe. Here are some typical questions that may be of help in this process:

✚ **Do you believe in ‘conversion therapies’ to make people straight?**

- Hopefully, what you will hear from your therapist is a clear “No”. I say that because homosexuality is not a mental illness and has not been categorized as such for decades. Moreover, national ethical guidelines are in place that oppose such therapies so if your therapist is conducting such treatment, they are likely operating outside the acceptable standards for their profession.

✚ **Why are some people GLBTQ and others straight?**

- What you are looking for in the answer of your potential therapist is acknowledgement of some of the biological basis for same-sex attractions as well as an awareness of the complexities. Warning lights should go off if the therapist response indicates trauma, lack of identity, or an attachment disorder is “the cause”. The direct implication such a position is that having same sex attractions is a symptom of something being wrong which of course it is not.



✚ Is therapy confidential?

- Confidentiality is clearly a concern in an intolerant and homophobic society. The answer about confidentiality is “yes” and “no”. For example, if you are with a licensed psychologist, the information is considered privileged communication and as such, it is confidential. Some other types of mental health professionals do not have such legal protection, so ask. In addition, there are exceptions to confidentiality that relate to harming yourself and others as well as abuse of children, elderly, and vulnerable populations. The use of insurance creates another tricky area for confidentiality. So a good question to ask, is “How do you protect my confidentiality?” For example, I write notes in very vague terms like “relationship issues” without specifying gender. You want the therapist to be able to describe how they proactively protect your confidentiality.

✚ Can you describe your practice and the populations with which you work?

- This is a good way to get at the comfort level and knowledge base of the therapist about issues facing our community. While certainly there are therapist who are gay-friendly and competent without having a lot of GLBTQ clients, it is a question that can be helpful in making a decision. It can be different to talk with someone who has had one or two clients, than with someone who has a large portion of their practice committed to our concerns.

✚ Are you involved in the community?

- Certainly there are many reasons a therapist may or may not be actively engaged in the community, so if you are comfortable about their answers in other areas, this should not be a rule-out. However, if you find that your potential therapist is involved in the community it may speak to their comfort level and knowledge base.

The choice of therapist is an important one, and unfortunately it is often a choice made in the middle of a crisis. Hopefully, this page has offered some basic ideas that may help you find a therapist with whom you feel safe and confident. If you have other questions regarding how to find a therapist, what to expect from therapy, or referrals in your area, I would welcome your call.

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